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ABSTRACT

Presented here are guidelines and resources to aid in the use of arts and literature to enhance and enliven religious education. Eight guidelines are suggested: (1) the values of communion, that is, the right relationship between God, neighbor and self, unity in pluralism and the dignity of the human person as an adopted child of God should be seen as core values; (2) the social psychological developmental approach to faith and an emphasis on the spiritual and moral life of young people should guide our selection of resources; (3) the works of Jesuit theologian, Father Avery Dulles, should be considered as guidelines; (4) E. D. Hirsch, Jr.'s Core Knowledge Foundation can be a guide to attaining cultural and religious literacy in a multicultural society; (5) recognition should be made of the contribution of women to arts and literature; (6) the catechetical approach to the use of arts and literature can enliven the message; (7) a story or parable has the potential to bring forth understanding and insights of which the child was unaware; (8) and emphasize positive and healthful ecumenical, interfaith, and science/faith relationships. A description of resources for grades K-8 that adhere to these guidelines concludes the paper. (MT)

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"MAKING THE MOST OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION USING LITERATURE AND THE ARTS TO ENLIVEN THE MESSAGE!"

by

Rev. Robert A. Marine, Ed.D.

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Note: This presentation in its original form was given as a workshop at the 94th Annual National Catholic Educational Association Convention & Exposition, April 1-4, 1997 at the Minneapolis Convention Center in Minneapolis, MN. This presentation has been revised and updated to reflect continuing development of this approach.

The purpose of this presentation is twofold: first, to offer a "tool," a set of guidelines or principles, that will be helpful to the practitioner in selecting from the vast array of children's and adolescent literature available on a variety of topics and themes in our culture. This includes the resource of the arts as both literature and the arts represent and speak to the human experience in a variety of ways. It is the human experience upon which and to which faith develops and speaks. Grace builds on nature and faith seeks understanding. The story-telling approach is emphasized and its implications for religious education and education in general are considered.

This presentation is not an attempt to offer a new formal curriculum. What it offers might be called a supplemental curriculum that enhances and enlivens religious education, the proclamation of the Gospel, the development of the spiritual and moral life of children, and the social-psychological developmental approach to faith. It offers a supplemental curriculum that has been recognized as an effective way of implementing the new **Catechism of the Catholic Church** in a variety of

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settings that gives particular emphasis to child development. This recognition came from the Office for the Catechism of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops for the "Mary, Help of Christians School 'Core Knowledge Project'" that has the use of literature and the arts as a significant theme running throughout the entire "project."

The second purpose of this presentation is to share with the participants selected examples from literature and the arts as found in educational and religious education resources that can be used in implementing this approach in a variety of ways and settings.

We begin with the goals, educational philosophy and psychology that underlie the principles and guidelines that are offered as criteria for the selection of resources from literature and the arts to enliven the Message.

Since this presentation was originally given, several developments have occurred that further exemplify the goals, philosophy, psychology and principles that were offered at that time. These developments encourage the further use and growth of the approach described in this presentation.

First, Cecilia Moore, an assistant professor of religious studies at the University of Dayton, in a recent article in The Catholic Telegraph, writes of the topic of religious themes in children's literature. Children are open to spirituality and have a spiritual yearning. This is the case whether they are students in public or Catholic schools. Speaking to the

spiritual yearning of children in a positive and creative way enhances their development. It also enables them to deal with religion as a prominent part of characters' lives in children's books, that runs the range of religious traditions. This is important as we enter a diverse world, of which religion is a part.

Second, in its most recent meeting, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops called for a more active ministry to youth. This ministry should take into account changes in our society, in the church and in research on adolescent development. Young people should be taught about various ethnic cultures. This will help in dealing with the issues of prejudice, racism and discrimination. The church should take the initiative in reaching out to other faiths, public schools and community groups to share in creating a healthier climate in our civic communities for all young people.

Third, at a recent meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscomb of Mobile, AL, and Bishop Donald W. Wuerl of Pittsburgh, PA, gave work-shops.

Archbishop Lipscomb leads the Catholic Common Ground Initiative, which he inherited from its founder the late Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago, IL. He encouraged theologians to restore a spirit of common ground, mutual respect and less divisiveness among themselves. He believes that the wealth of theological knowledge should be used to combat religious

illiteracy that is present in our midst and often nurtures misunderstanding and division.

Bishop Wuerl presented a session on this coming fall's Synod of the Bishops of the Americas which will occur in Rome. He described three characteristics of our age that are part of the background to the coming synod: first, the present moment is one of religious illiteracy. Second, it is a time of aggressive secularism. Third, even with the powerful attractiveness of materialism, there is a resurgence of a hunger for the Spirit - the things and life of the Spirit.

Bishop Wuerl went on to add that he thinks that the synod should present a vision of human life flowing from our Catholic tradition that emphasizes both the worth of the individual human person and at the same time the communal and social nature of man. The synod should try to offer a vision of humanity for the next millennium. This will require individual as well as institutional support.

With these recent developments in mind, we now consider eight principles or guidelines that can direct our efforts at using literature and the arts to enliven the Message and to present the core knowledge and core values reflected in the new **Catechism**. These guidelines or principles also should assist the development of cultural literacy both within the Church and our society, the social-psychological development of children and young people, and the development of their spiritual life. This should facilitate a more dynamic approach toward our goals.

Eight Principles or Guidelines for Selecting Resources from Literature and the Arts

These eight principles or guidelines, while neither comprehensive or absolute, can be helpful in selecting resources from literature and the arts that enliven the Message.

First, in 1982, Catholic News Service published a series of articles to help readers of Catholic newspapers prepare for the promulgation of The 1983 **Revised Code of Canon Law.** In the article, "New Church Law: Its Future," Canadian canon lawyer Father Francis Morrisey is quoted as saying: "We are still in a period of shifting values in the church as we continue to move from a church centered on hierarchy to one founded on communion, from a church of uniformity to a church of unity in pluralism, from a church identified with structures to a church centered on the human person and his/her dignity as an adopted child of God." The values of communion, that is, the right relationship between God, neighbor and self, unity in pluralism and the dignity of the human person as an adopted child of God should be seen as core values and find institutional support. These values also speak to the recent developments described in the beginning of this presentation.

It is also important to note here the manner in which the new **Catechism of the Catholic Church** describes the seven sacraments. The sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation are described as the Sacraments of Initiation, Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick as the Sacraments of Healing, and Matrimony and Holy Orders as the Sacraments at the Service of

Communion or Community. There is an emphasis on development, growth, wholeness, healing and communion with God, neighbor and self. This is both individual and communal or social.

For those involved in public education, one might see in the "Core Values Project" of Phi Delta Kappa a similar approach to values in the civic society and public education.

Second, the social psychological developmental approach to faith and an emphasis on the spiritual and moral life of children and young people should guide our selections of resources. Jesus Christ is the paradigm of the complete human person as described in the works of Father Robert Hater and Dr. John Sanford. He is the guide on our journey of growth and development, healing and wholeness, completeness and communion.

The work of Dr. Robert Coles on the spiritual and moral life of children and the call of stories as they develop the moral imagination of children and young people are particularly insightful in the selecting of resources. Dr. John Sanford's encouragement of the use of stories in religious education as a way of calling forth the total person, mind, body and spirit, should give us confidence in our approach.

One of the major advantages of Dr. Robert Coles work is his research on the spiritual life of Christian, Jewish, Islamic children and children of other beliefs. His research on how children sees their respective faith traditions, for example, Christian salvation, Islamic surrender and Jewish righteousness, contributes to an understanding of their spiritual life, a mutual

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respect, and a sense of unity that can emerge from an emphasis on the spiritual life. Dr. Coles work is an excellent guide to the selection of resources that speak to the imaginative breadth and depth of the spiritual life of our young people.

Third, the work of the Jesuit theologian, Father Avery Dulles, should be considered as a guideline from three different perspectives.

First, Father Dulles' book on the six major approaches or models through which the Church's character can be understood, as Institution, Mystical Communion, Sacrament, Herald, Servant and Community of Disciples, provides a dynamic framework in which to consider the life of men and women of faith and their experiences in the Church. Literature and the arts speaks to these experiences as well as to their experience of the spiritual life. In addition, by utilizing Father Dulles' approach, we can present unity in pluralism and see that all six models are necessary for theological balance.

Second, Fr. Dulles' reflection on the total teaching of Pope John Paul II as "prophetic humanism" helps to present the dignity of the human person as an adopted child of God. It also places John Paul II's total teaching firmly within the Judaeo-Christian tradition of the right relationships between God, neighbor and self as seen in the biblical prophets and the teaching of Jesus Christ. This includes the concepts of social justice as found in Church teaching.

And finally, Fr. Dulles' reflections on John Paul II's

preparations for the celebration of the Jubilee 2000, "through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, we return to the Father," give dynamic helps in dealing with a number of issues in the past. The Holy Father is calling on the Church, in the spirit of John the Baptist, to engage in a collective examination of conscience as we prepare for the new millennium. Issues such as violence, even in the name of truth, inappropriate ecumenical and interfaith relationships on the part of the Church, wrongs against women in the Church, and the rupture of the healthy relationship between science and faith are to be addressed. These are all fertile ground for the use of literature and the arts to clear away the past and allow for a more effective evangelization, proclamation of the Gospel and a new springtime of holiness and service.

The fourth principle or guideline for the selection of resources from literature and the arts is cultural and religious literacy in a multicultural society. In this regard the work of E. D. Hirsch, Jr.'s Core Knowledge Foundation can serve as a guide. Based on his book, **Cultural Literacy**, this Foundation has designed a Core Knowledge Program for grades K-6 that is in use in both public and private education. This approach encourages the development of the knowledge of the mainstream of culture while recognizing and exploring the diversity. This approach also encourages knowledge of the diverse religious traditions beginning at grade levels K-6. The Core Knowledge Program is seen as a healthy program for cultural literacy in

a multicultural society. The use of literature and the arts and storytelling is a part of this program.

The Core Knowledge Program was used by me as a model in my development of the "Mary, Help of Christians School 'Core Knowledge Project'" for grades K-8. My goal was to present during class visits, divisional and all-school Liturgies, and class communal reconciliation services the mainstream teaching of the Church, based on the new **Catechism**. At the same time, I wished to present a biblically oriented approach that also respects the other religious traditions and diversity within the Church. This is best done through a variety of resources, in particular, literature and the arts, that will be discussed later in this presentation. This approach does encourage cultural and religious literacy while respecting diversity.

The fifth guiding principle for the selection of resources from literature and the arts is the contribution of women to literature and the arts. Through the course of the development of this approach, it became clear that women's contribution to literature and the arts was not always clearly recognized in the field itself.

This personal experience of my own was reinforced by a homily given by Pope John Paul II. In this particular homily, John Paul II recognizes that women's contributions to culture has not been consistently recognized in literature and the arts. This is an injustice that must be corrected and something that the Church should address and emphasize.

It does take an extra effort is using literature and the arts to enliven the Message to find resources that reflect women's contributions to culture. However, the effort is necessary and vital in our work.

Our sixth principle or guideline involves a consideration of the particular catechetical approach taken toward the use of literature and the arts to enliven the message. Father Robert Hater's recent work, **New Vision, New Directions,** is meant to be a guide for religious educators in implementing the new **Catechism of the Catholic Church.** One will find many of the thoughts and concepts contained in these eight principles in this recent work by Father Hater.

In addition, Father Hater's work, **News That Is Good - Evangelization for Catholics,** also serves as a valuable resource for this approach. Of particular interest to our discussion here is Father Hater's belief in this work that we need to present Jesus as the complete and total human person, a completeness and wholeness that flows from his identity, his union with God, and his union with all people and all creation. Thus, our path to completeness, wholeness and fulfillment lies in the Way, Truth and Life of Jesus Christ.

Thus, we might describe the catechetical approach of the use of literature and the arts as "transfiguration catechesis." Dominic Ashkar has recently written **Transfiguration Catechesis - A New Vision Based on the Liturgy & the Catechism of the Catholic Church.** In this work, Fr. Ashkar demonstrates how both

the Liturgy and the **Catechism** lend themselves to the experience of ascending the mountain with the Lord, experiencing a transfiguration based on our identity, relationship and communion with God, neighbor and self, and living that vision in our daily lives unto fulfillment in the kingdom of God eternally.

The psychologist, Abraham Maslow, might liken the "transfiguration experience" to that of the "peak moment experience." In the "peak moment experience," we, in an instant or particular moment, sense our true identity, self, potential and oneness with self, each other, creation and God. The experience of a "peak moment" gives direction and vision to our lives.

Finally, Maria Jaoudi, in her work, **Christian & Islamic Spirituality - Sharing a Journey**, writes of the classical mystical stages of the spiritual life, purification, transformation, and union with God, to which she adds a God-centered ecology. For those familiar with the rites for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults of which there is a Children's Rite for children beyond infant baptism, one will find these stages throughout these rites.

As Dr. John Sanford notes, what we need to be purified of is our egocentricity, our self-centeredness. In this way our true identity in union with the Greater Will within us can emerge and transform to its fulfillment according to the paradigm of the total and complete person who is Jesus Christ.
In this way, we will know maturity and fulfillment of our

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spirits.

Maria Jaoudi's work on the classical mystical stages of the spiritual life serves as an excellent guide in the selection of resources from literature and the arts. For it has been my experience that we will experience both unity and respect for diversity based on the spiritual life in literature and the arts seen from this perspective.

Our final two principles or guidelines are somewhat repetitious, yet give an emphasis that is needed.

The seventh guideline or principle for the selection of literature and the arts is the storytelling approach. Jesus, as the Master Teacher, was also a master of the use of the story or parable. A story or parable has the potential to touch the depth and breadth of the child and bring forth understanding and insight of which the child was previously unaware. Stories and spiritual rites and rituals can touch children in ways that the simple imparting of knowledge cannot. As Father Andrew Greeley once noted, children will remember stories and spiritual rites and rituals long after they have forgotten the knowledge and information they have been given in educational experiences.

Our eighth and final principle is to emphasize positive and healthy ecumenical relationships, cultural and ethnic relationships, interfaith relationships and relationships between science and faith. For example, every so often it is good to remind people of the Common Lectionary that we share on Sundays with other Christian denominations. We should be emphasizing

creative approaches to respect for our differences and our unity based on a shared sense of humanity and the unity that can come from the spiritual life.

Selected Resources That Emphasize Literature and the Arts

The "Mary, Help of Christians School 'Core Knowledge Project'" contains an eight page bibliography of background references underlying this approach and resources to be used in implementing this approach by grade level, K-8.

In addition, it contains a description of the major themes running through the resources. It also contains a description of how the project speaks to the religious attitudes of the parents, the religious life of many in this country as researched by Philip Hammond in **Religion and Personal Autonomy**, (1992), Wade Clark Roof in **A Generation of Seekers**, (1993), and Dean R. Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald A. Luidens in **Vanishing Boundaries**, (1994).

The documentation of the project also includes reviews by religious educators, educators and pastoral ministers, feedback from the junior high students and two publications describing the project. It was a six year curriculum development project.

The resources were selected to be used during my class visits to grades K-8 each quarter, divisional class Liturgies, All-School Liturgies, and class reconciliation services. My purpose here will be to highlight some of the resources that exemplify the eight principles or guidelines previously

presented as used in selecting resources from literature and the arts.

Now in my eighth year, and second assignment, since beginning to use the approach of using literature and the arts to enliven the Message at the elementary and junior high school level, it is possible to begin to draw some implications from the use of this approach, its advantages and disadvantages.

One advantage is that it emphasizes, speaks to and develops the intuitive sense of the children and young people. This also finds its place in the new **Catechism** as it refers to heaven where the person experiences an intuitive vision of the essence of God without the mediation of any creature retaining or rather finding their true identity in Jesus Christ and enjoying a communion of life and love with the Trinity, the Blessed Virgin and all the Blessed. The spiritual life draws upon mind, body and spirit and the intuitive sense can speak to all these levels and their interaction.

One disadvantage of this approach is the challenge of delivery or presentation, especially during homilies. It can seem that the priest or celebrant is reading too much instead of making a personal presentation that flows from himself. However, it is important to use language appropriate to the students' or children's level and to recognize the source literature or the arts on which the homily or presentation is based.

During class visits to grades K-8 over the past eight years,

first at Mary, Help of Christians School and now at Saint John the Baptist Elementary and Junior High School, I have found the following resources helpful.

For kindergarten classes, resources and stories appropriate to grade level on nature, creation and ecology are appropriate and build a basis for the first grade religious education curriculum of God as Father and Creator. **Maui-Maui** by Stephen Cosgrove is still an excellent work in this regard. Stories about saints in the Church are also helpful at this level. Ethel Pochocki's **Saints of the Seasons for Children** and Joan Windham's **Sixty Saints for Boys** and **Sixty Saints for Girls** can be adapted for use at this level. These are simply some of the resources that I have found workable at this level.

For class visits to grades One through Three, the **Children's Bible Trivia** game for ages 6 and older is appropriate. It is helpful if the teacher reviews the questions to fit in with their religious education curriculum. However, it is also helpful to use the questions as is since it provides an opportunity for the students to share what they have learned about Scripture from simply hearing it proclaimed on Sundays with their parents at Mass and at school Masses. The competition is better in teams rather than individuals since this emphasizes the Christian concept of community and shared use of gifts and talents. This particular board game is based on the King James Version of the **Bible.** This does not pose any problem at this level and is helpful since many Catholic schools have a large number of

non-Catholics enrolled.

For ages 6-9, Inos Biffi's illustrated **My First Catechism: Prayer, Sacraments, The Ten Commandments, The Apostles Creed,** first written in Italian, can be adapted and use in a variety of settings. Marsha Sinetar's **Why Can't Grown-ups Believe in Angels** is especially helpful in explaining the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. The letter of Chief Seattle in book form is helpful for continuing the theme of creation, nature and the environment.

For class visits to grades Four and Five, the use of **Family Bible Trivia - Student Questions** continues to build on the basis established in the first three grades while increasing in level of knowledge. While the format can be adjusted to grade level, the same emphasis should be present.

For ages 10 and older, the **Divinity Board Game - A Catholic Catechism Learning System** can be used and has a variety of levels of difficulty appropriate to age. This can be done in a variety of settings and formats.

For class visits to grades Six through Eight, the board game, **Catechic,** a board game on Catholic and other religious cultures, is extremely helpful. Although this board game was designed for ages 14 and older, it can be adapted for ages 12 and 13. This board game uses history, musicals, literature, the arts, sports and various forms of culture, other religions and Christian denominations as well as Catholic Tradition and Scripture as the basis for its questions. It can easily lead

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into a discussion of world religions, for which John Catoir's **World Religions - Beliefs Behind Today's Headlines** is very workable. Father Catoir is the former director of The Christophers.

As a high school theology, social studies, social psychology and history teacher, I have used literature and the arts from science fiction and contemporary films in my classes. This has an additional effect of helping the students view contemporary media from the perspective of values, their own and those of the producers, directors, actors and advertisers.

Liturgically, for grades One through Five, Inos Biffi's illustrated **An Introduction to the Liturgical Year** is very good and compatible with the new **Catechism.** Of particular note also is the use of skits during school, divisional and class Masses and Reconciliation Services. A resource in this area is Harold Langdon's **Children Celebrate - 39 Plays for Feasts.** The story-telling approach during these Liturgies can draw upon any of Father Brian Cavanaugh's four volumes of parables on different themes and Father Joseph Donders' cross-cultural Scriptural reflections and stories. Thomas Goodhue's **Sharing the Good News With Children - Stories for the Common Lectionary** uses many examples from history, literature and the arts and is very helpful for Sunday Masses. Thomas Goodhue is a Methodist minister and has taught in an interdenominational school. This particular work of his has an imprimatur from the Catholic Church.

The works of Rabbi Sandra Sasso and Jewish Lights Publishing

are excellent in a variety of settings for children of all ages. These works also have the endorsement of Protestant, Jewish and Catholic leaders. Rabbi Sasso's works are also helpful in recognizing women's contributions in the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures. In the New Testament or Christian Scriptures, recent works on the Deaconess Phoebe are also helpful in this regard. Dr. John Sanford's **The Man Who Wrestled With God** can provide background in this regard from the Old Testament Perspective. Dr. Sanford is an Episcopalian priest.

Finally, on separate topics, the works of Dr. M. Scott Peck are helpful in the areas of the relationship of science and faith, the characteristics of cults and the journey of the spiritual life. Ronald Quillo's works on the relationship of the Church to the New Age Movement are very good. Both of these men's works are more usable at the junior high level as is Father Henri Nouwen's works on the spiritual life, especially, **Jesus & Mary**, and, **The Living Reminder - Service and Prayer in Memory of Jesus Christ.**

Recently, I once again found Dr. Peck's work very helpful in presenting and explaining John Paul II's recent teaching on "creationism" and evolution.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would simply like to express my sincere thanks to and appreciation for the many men and women whose quality work provides excellent resources to use literature and the arts to enliven the Message!